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SUBJECT: PROFILES OF ANTI-TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS PROGRAMS IN SOUTHERN VIETNAM

REF: A) HCMC 801 B) HCMC 191 C) HCMC 090 and previous D) HANOI 393 E) HANOI 394 F) HANOI 402

HO CHI MIN 00000936 001.2 OF 003

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Women's Union officials in Ho Chi Minh City, An Giang, and Can Tho provinces report that GVN anti-TIP efforts under the GVN National Program of Action are generally uniformly implemented, but the resources made available to the different provinces are not. Meanwhile, NGOs AFESIP (Acting for Women in Distressing Situations) and ADAPT (the USAID-funded An Giang-Dong Thap Alliance for the Prevention of Trafficking) provided a less optimistic perspective on the Women's Unions activities. Contrary to recent estimates in the 2007 Vietnam TIP Report, the Can Tho and An Giang's Women's Union reported many fewer TIP victims in their region. This under-reporting may be the result of the fact that the Women's Unions--and the GVN in general--lack a systematic way of tracking TIP victims and may not be sharing with each other the little bits of information they do have. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Between July 2 and August 1, PolOff discussed anti-TIP efforts with Women's Union officials in An Giang, Can Tho and Ho Chi Minh City, three of Vietnam's highest-risk areas for trafficking in persons. (Note: Under the GVN National Program of Action, the Vietnamese Women's Union, one of the six "mass organizations" in Vietnam, plays a lead role in anti-TIP educational awareness and communications programs. It also supports TIP victim returnees. End note.) The Women's Union officials talked to us about the activities they have carried out pursuant to Prime Minister's Decree 130, which outlines the GVN's anti-TIP strategy and National Program of Action. The Decree 130 programs run by the Women's Union focus on raising public awareness and providing health care, vocational training, and reintegration for returning TIP victims, who typically reside in shelters from six months to a year. The government-subsidized shelters and women's centers also work to educate local communities to prevent women and children from becoming TIP victims and to alleviate any stigmatization towards returning victims. The centers offer vocational training classes such as sewing, embroidery, rug weaving and making artificial flower arrangements. They also provide small loans for women to start their own businesses and legal and counseling services. As carrying out activities under Decree 130 is only one of six official functions carried out by the Women's Unions, they also broaden their efforts by partnering with organizations like the Vietnam Youth Union and the media on a variety of TIP-prevention activities.

AN GIAN PROVINCE WOMEN'S UNION  
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13. (SBU) Leaders of the An Giang Women's Union told us that since 2001, their branch has helped 52 trafficking victims reintegrate into their communities. Vice Chairwoman Ms. Tran Thi Lan noted that of these 52 women, 10 currently lead stable lives and have started their own families. From 2001 to June

2007, 37 TIP victims (32 women and five children) were rescued and repatriated through official channels. Most of the returnees in An Giang come from Cambodia via bordering Tay Ninh province. Other risk areas the Women's Union focuses on are Chau Phu, Chau Doc and An Phu districts. Currently the Union does not precisely track the number of women trafficked from these areas.

14. (SBU) The An Giang Women's Union has cooperated with two bordering provinces in Cambodia, Ta Keo and Can Dan, but stated that such cross-border cooperation is limited by the language barrier. In addition, a bilateral agreement of cooperation on TIP issues between An Giang and the two Cambodian provinces is fairly new and operational details have not yet been formalized.

15. (SBU) Lan noted that TIP victims generally do not want to work with authorities to convict traffickers because the traffickers are often family members or acquaintances. The Women's Union stressed they do not pressure known TIP victims either to publicly identify themselves or to force them to use its services. Surprisingly, the Women's Union believes that the number of women trafficked in An Giang is low, when compared to other provinces, and is decreasing. This view seems inconsistent with the USG's 2007 Vietnam TIP Report, which estimates the number of women trafficked in Vietnam since 1998 could be as high as 50,000 victims (Ref D). It also conflicts with reports from international NGOs working in the area.

#### A GRASSROOTS PERSPECTIVE IN AN GIANG

16. (SBU) ADAPT (An Giang Dong Thap Alliance for the Prevention of Trafficking) is a USAID-funded program that works to prevent trafficking in the Mekong Delta. The project is administered by three Vietnamese American NGOs: Pacific Links Foundation, East Meets West Foundation and the International Children Assistance

HO CHI MIN 00000936 002.2 OF 003

Network. ADAPT uses scholarships as a TIP prevention tool by helping at-risk girls cover school expenses until they graduate. The girls are nominated by their schools and screened for eligibility by ADAPT. On August 1, PolOff attended an ADAPT Awards Ceremony in An Giang that gave scholarships to 122 girls in grades six through ten. The scholarships provide funds for tuition, books, supplies, uniforms, and even health care. This year, 281 girls in three districts of An Giang were awarded, many for the second time. In addition to the scholarships, ADAPT also donated 17 personal computers, dictionaries, and bilingual books to schools and education centers; and awarded 140 bicycles to girls who improved their grades during the school year.

18. (SBU) The ADAPT program is not without challenges. During the 2006-2007 school year, 35 ADAPT recipients dropped out of school. Of the 35 drop-outs, 19 were eventually convinced to return to school. PolOff met with two ADAPT scholarship recipients, Le Thi Trinh (Grade 9) and Nguyen Thi Truc Ly (Grade 9) at their homes. It was clear during the visit how poverty, poor living conditions, and problematic family relationships greatly contribute to the problem of trafficking in persons in Vietnam. ADAPT organizers noted that convincing the parents of the benefits of education for their girls is one of their biggest challenges, because parents often feel the girls should work instead to help out with family finances.

#### HCMC MARRIAGE ASSISTANCE CENTER

19. (SBU) In Ho Chi Minh City, trafficked women are in the minority at the Women's Union Shelter, as the majority of residents are victims of sexual abuse. Of the women who complete the rehabilitation program, 70 percent reintegrate successfully and 20 percent re-marry. Chairperson Nguyen Thi Ngoc Hanh of the HCMC Women's Union and Nguyen Thi Bach Tuyet, Director of the Marriage Assistance Center, described their TIP program as having three components: the women's shelter, the Marriage Assistance Center and a public awareness campaign.

110. (SBU) The Marriage Assistance Center is a matchmaking service where women can take a variety of classes designed to assist them in building successful marriages with foreign spouses. The Center boasts approximately 100 successful matches

a year. The classes include language courses, cooking foreign cuisine, making floral arrangements, and learning about immigration laws and individual rights in their respective host country.

¶11. (SBU) Foreigners are then matched with a prospective Vietnamese spouse after completing a questionnaire that includes information about the foreigners' interests and personality traits. The system differs from illegal marriage brokerage services, which commonly feature foreign men picking women out of lineups. At the Marriage Assistance Center, the matched couples court each other via phone and/or email. The prospective foreign spouse must also meet and be approved by his fiancée's parents. The Marriage Assistance Center does not charge a fee, unlike most commercial marriage brokers.

¶12. (SBU) The HCMC Women's Union Awareness Program targets at-risk groups by arranging talks, publishing news articles, and distributing information via brochures and their website ([www.hcmcwu.org.vn](http://www.hcmcwu.org.vn)). Leaflets are also handed out at the Women's Club, which has an average attendance of 7,000 women per year. Through their public awareness campaign, the Club reveals the most common tricks used by traffickers to lure women overseas, while encouraging the community at large to denounce traffickers to the police. They also give out advice on how to obtain important travel documents and suggest women leave photocopies of their documents at home with a trusted family member or friend.

#### A GRASSROOTS PERSPECTIVE IN HCMC

¶13. (SBU) On July 20, PolOff met with George Blanchard, Director of NGO AFESIP (Acting for Women in Distressing Situations) Vietnam, to discuss that organization's anti-TIP programs in HCMC. AFESIP is a non-profit NGO that originated in Cambodia. It helps those women who have been trafficked or forced into prostitution.

¶14. (SBU) AFESIP focuses on educating sex workers about safe sex practices and counsels them about the dangers of the sex trade. Through hotlines and street teams manned by volunteers, they disseminate condoms and information on sex education and HIV/AIDS. They also run a shelter, in conjunction with the Women's Union, for trafficked women who have returned to Vietnam. Their staff includes four social workers, two peer

HO CHI MIN 00000936 003.2 OF 003

educators and more than 150 volunteers. Their shelter is run in collaboration with the Women's Union.

¶15. (SBU) According to Blanchard, getting an accurate number of TIP victims would be close to impossible in Vietnam, because the numbers as well as the circumstances change every year. He believes the number of Vietnamese women sent to Cambodia is decreasing, but he has found new cases of victims arriving from Laos. Despite the difficulties in getting accurate numbers, he feels the Police Department's numbers are the most reliable. (Note: PolOff contacted the HCMC police, who declined to share their figures. End note.)

¶16. (SBU) Blanchard said AFESIP is currently focused on documenting its program model, so that it may be replicated by others. Blanchard believes the size of the program is not as important as achieving a high standard of quality for others to follow. AFESIP's program has been proudly showcased by the GVN. While funds are always a concern, Blanchard says capacity-building is AFESIP's biggest challenge. He explained that even with an increase in funds, AFESIP would still need human capital to grow. In the future, AFESIP hopes to open a separate shelter for child victims.

#### CAN THO

¶17. (SBU) In southern Can Tho Province, Ms. Lam Nhat Phuong, Deputy Director of DoLISA (Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs) described the operations of the 'Women Far Away from Home' organization. Established in 1995, the group provides services for TIP returnees, including social networking, HIV/AIDS counseling, and vocational training. As in An Giang, the Deputy Director also claimed that the number of TIP cases in

Can Tho is relatively low when compared to neighboring provinces. However, she admitted that the number is low primarily because the union lacks capacity in identifying victims of trafficking. Right now, the Women's Union becomes aware of victims only if they return and identify themselves or are identified by authorities. This year, four women have been returned by police after being apprehended at the Cambodian border. Ms. Phuong said most women from Can Tho are believed to be trafficked to Macao and Thailand through Ho Chi Minh City and Cambodia.

¶18. (SBU) The Can Tho Women's Union has also received non-government funding since 2005. The HCF Foundation funds awareness efforts, while a Spanish NGO funds small loans for women to start up their own business. Health services are provided by the Provincial Department of Health and HIV testing is subsidized by the USG PEPFAR program and NGO Family Health International (FHI). The incidence of HIV/AIDS is high among the women in the Women Far Away From Home organization, and lack of medication for HIV-positive patients is the highest priority. The Union also highlighted their greatest triumph thus far--six women who had been forced into abusive marriages overseas who returned and have now successfully completed the program.

¶19. (SBU) COMMENT: The lack of accurate measurement tools to track the number of trafficked victims remains a major problem in combating and preventing TIP in Vietnam. The fact that officials of the Women's Union in An Giang and Can Tho believe that the trafficking problem in their region is "relatively small" despite lack of accurate numbers is also a concern--and points to a lack of cooperation and information-sharing among the provincial and city Women's Union groups. While HCMC's Marriage Assistance Center is a positive step to combat the rising tide of illegal trafficking rings posing as marriage brokers, the service is not being extensively used. On the other hand international grassroots organizations with GVN support such as ADAPT and AFESIP are managing small but successful programs that serve as important models of how to use resources effectively to combat root causes of TIP and help victims reintegrate into society. END COMMENT.  
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